

[Clyde (Kingfish) Smith]

Those come under the head of labor songs, but they're pretty bum, and I don't see why we should include rhymed pep talks in the book. lw. Songs rhymes - Street cries and chants

Marion Charles Hatch,

334 East 49th Street,

November 29, 1939

Interview with Clyde (Kingfish) Smith, colored.

The interview, as given word for word, took place partly during the recording of his songs and cries in the basement of B. Shapiro, 300 East 101 Street, and partly at his home, 307 East 100th Street.

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"These songs are not written down. The words I give now might not fit just as on the record there."

"You mean that they are different?"

"Yes, I sing them different. I put the words to the tune, to fit the occasion.

"I usually sing songs to fit the neighborhood.

"Well, if I get in a Jewish neighborhood, I sing songs like 'Bei Mir Bist Du Shon'.

"I pick words to git the occasion. Words that rhyme fast and they can understand them fast.

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"Well I go in a colored neighborhood they like something swingy. I might sing the same song but I put it in a swing tune.

"I go into Spanish neighborhood but I speak to them in Spanish".

"When I started peddling that was in 1932, that's when I started singing them. [Heigho?] fish man, bring down you dishpan, that's what started it. 'Fish ain't but five cent a pound'. That 'aint' is the regular dialect. I found the people liked it and it was hard times then, the depression and people can hardly believe fish is five cents a pound, so they started buying. There was quite a few peddlers and somebody had to have something extra to attract the attention. So when I came around, I started making a rhyme, it [was a hit?] right away."

"I found that my old songs wasn't going over so good so I had to get new tunes and new words, you know just something new to attract attention.

"Come on down and gather round, I got the best fish in the town." That was the new development.

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"There was no peddlin' down in North Carolina, in that particular town where I grew up, so I did not hear such songs and rhymes when I was a boy. In Wilmington, North Carolina, there used to be a man say, "Bring out the dishpan, here's the fish man." I used to hear my father and them talking about it.

"One of the first things I learned about peddling was, to be any success at all, you had to have an original cry. I know several peddlers that started out and they hollered, Old Fish Man, but it doesn't work."

"I've gone blocks where several fish men have gone already and sold fish like nobody had been there. When I sing, a certain amount of people will be standing around, looking and

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listening, and that attracts more people and whenever people see a crowd they think it's a bargain so they want to get in on it."

"When I cry it will be so loud that the people come to the windows, look out. They come down with bedroom shoes on, with bathrobes, and some have pans or newspapers to put the fish in."

"When I first come in a block nobody pays any attention. Then I start singing, get them to laughing, and looking and soon they start buying. A lot of them just hang around to hear the song. I always try to give the best I can for the money, the best fish for the money, and that makes repeated customers. A lot of people wait for my individual cry."

"The average day I cover about eight blocks and spend about an hour in each block, sometimes longer. Sometimes, on Friday, it takes me about nine hours to cover what I would cover in seven hours another day."

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"When I have crabs the kids like to see the crabs jump and bite, so they stand around in big crowds."

"Sometimes, when I sing, the kids be dancing the Lindy Hop and Trucking. The women buy most of the fish. I find Home Relief and WPA people the best customers. They buy more. They have to budget more near than the average family."

"In white and Jewish neighborhoods I feature the words but in the colored neighborhood I feature the tune. In the Jewish neighborhood they appreciate the rhyming and the words more, while in the colored neighborhood they appreciate the swinging and the, tune, as well as the words. I put in a sort of jumping rhythm for the colored folks. That swing music comes right from old colored folks spirituals."

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"In the street anything goes. Slap a word in there. The way I was this morning (recording) I was very good. I didn't mess them up. On the street whatever comes to my mind I say it, if I think it will be good. The main idea is when I got something I want to put over I just find something to rhyme with it. And the main requirement for that is mood. You gotta be in the mood. You got to put yourself in it. You've got to feel it. It's got to be more or less an expression, than a routine. Of course sometimes a drink of King Kong (liquor) helps."

CLYDE SMITH

300 East 100 Street

MCH [HI IN HO FISH SONG?]

(Tune of Minnie the Moocher) I'M THE [HI DR HI DR?] HO FISH MAN; AND I CAN REALLY SELL FISH, I CAN; SOME TIME I SELL ['EM HIGH?], HI DE HI DE HI DE HI. SOME TIME I SELL 'EM MIGHTY LOW. LOW, HO, HO, HO, HO, HO. I SELL 'EM UP, I SELL 'EM DOWN, I SELL 'EM ALL AROUND THIS TOWN. SO HI, DE, HI, DE, HI. AND HI DE HO DE HO, HI DE HI DE HI. HI DE HO, HO, HO, HO.

Clyde Smith

307 East [180?] Street

MCH SHAD SONG

("I Made That Tune Up Myself") I GOT SHAD, AIN'T YOU GLAD? I GOT SHAD, SO DON'T BE MAD. I GOT SHAD, GO TELL YOUR DAD. IT'S THE BEST OLD SHAD HE EVER HAD. I GOT SHAD, CAUGHT 'EM IN THE SUN. I GOT SHAD. I CAUGHT JUST FOR FUN. SO IF YOU AIN'T GOT NO MONEY YOU CAN'T HAVE NONE. I GOT SHAD, AIN'T YOU GLAD? I GOT SHAD, TELL YOU GREAT GRANDDAD. IT'S THE BEST OLD SHAD HE EVER HAD.

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STORMY WEATHER I can't go home 'till all my fish is gone. Stormy weather. I can't keep my [fish?] together, Sellin' 'em all the time. If you don't buy 'em Old rag man will get me. If you do buy 'em Your folks 'll kinda let me Walk in the sun once more. I don't see why Your folks don't come and buy Stormy weather, Come on, Let's get together, Sellin' 'em all the time.

“I wouldn't sing this on in a Jewish neighborhood. They don't know the tune and they couldn't appreciate that song. Only in a colored neighborhood.”

BEI MIR [BIST DU SHON?] [Bei Mir bist du shon?], I got big [brak on?] fish again. Bei mir bust du shon, I think they're grand. I could say bello bello, And even voom de van. That would only tell you, How grand they are. Bei mir bust du shon, I got flounders again. Bei mir [bist?] du shon, I know they're grand.

“This goes over good in either Jewish or colored neighborhoods, but I have to swing it up [a?] bit in the colored neighborhoods.”

JUMPIN' JIVE JIM, JAM, JUMP, JUMPIN' JIVE MAKE YOU BUY YO FISH ON THE EAST SIDE, OH, BOY, WHAT YOU GONNA SAY THERE GATES? JIM, JAM, JUMP, JUMPIN' JIVE. WHEN YOU EAT MY FISH, YOU'LL EAT FOUR OR FIVE. PAL OF MINE, PAL OF MINE, SWANEE SHORE. COME ON, BUY MY FISH ONCE MORE. OH BOY, OH BOY, JIM, JAM, JUMP, JUMPIN' JIVE. MAKE YOU DIG YOUR FISH ON THE MELLOW SIDE. OH BOY, WHAT YOU GONNA SAY THERE GATES? DON'T YOU HEAR THEM [HOOP CATS CALL?]?

(“THAT MEANS THE MUSIC IS IN YOU AND YOU'RE ALL [LIVINED?] UP. YOU WANT TO DANCE AND SWING IT”.) COME ON, BOYS, AND LET'S BUY 'EM ALL. OH BOY, WHAT YOU GONNA SAY THERE GATES?

(“Boy” is a variation for 'Gates'.)

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In these jump joints, that means where they dance and drink and smoke the marijuana weeds. The marijuana weed is a 'jumping jive'. The expression is 'knock me in a jive there Gates'. That means, 'give me a marijuana cigarette'. The jumping jive is suppose to make you do all these things. When you have the jumping jive on, you're supposed to do all these things, buy the fish."

TISKET A TASKET A TISKET, A TASKET, I SELL FISH BY THE BASKET. AND IF YOU FOLKS DON'T BUY SOME FISH, I'M GONNA PUT YOU IN A CASKET. I'LL CARRY YOU ON DOWN THE AVENUE, AND NOT A [?] THING YOU'LL DO. I'LL DIG, DIG, DIG, ALL AROUND, THEN I'LL PUT YOU IN THE GROUND. A TISKET, A TASKET, I SELL 'EM BY THE BASKET.

"They like that. A couple of years ago, when that song was popular, they liked it then. When a song is popular and I work up my time to that, I work out words to fit the tune and when the popularity if the song dies away that song ceases to be a hit even with the fish customers. When a song is in its height of popularity people will ask you to sing that fish song at that time. So that each of my songs represents a certain era of music."

DON'T YOU FELL MY LEG DON'T YOU FEEL MY HAD HAND , CAUSE I'M THAT OLD FISH MAN. AND IF YOU FEEL MY HAND, I'LL FILL UP YOUR PAN. SO DON'T YOU FEEL MY HAND NO, DON'T YOU FEEL MY THIGH, I'LL TELL YOU WHY, AND IF YOU FEEL MY THIGH, YOU'LL COME DOWN AND BUY. YOU'LL COME DOWN AND BUY. YOU'LL GO HOME AND FRY. SO DON'T YOU FEEL MY THIGH.

FISH AND VEGETABLES

"A song like this I'd just look on the wagon and rhyme up something to match with it. When I sand this song, this morning, I was just thinking of something to rhyme then". I GOT VEGETABLES TODAY, SO DON'T GO AWAY. STICK AROUND AND YOU'LL HEAR ME SAY, BUY 'EM BY THE POUND, PUT 'EM IN A SACK HURRY UP AND GET 'EM CAUSE

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I'M NOT COMING BACK. I GOT APPLES, ONIONS AND COLORED GREENS. I GOT THE BEST STRING BEANS, TUAT I EVER SEEN I GOT ORANGES, TOMATOES, NICE SOUTHERN SWEET POTATOES. I GOT YELLOW YAMS FROM BIRMINGHAM. AND IF YOU WANT SOME, HERE I AM. AND IF YOU DON'T WANT NONE I DON'T GIVE A YAM, YAM, YAM. I GOT GREEN GREENS FROM NEW ORLEANS.

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FISH AND VEGETABLES I GOT THE GREENEST GREENS I EVER SEEN, AND I SURE SEEN A WHOLE LOT OF GREENS I GOT CAULIFLOWER AND MUSTARD GREENS. THE BEST CAULIFLOWER I EVER SEEN. SO BUY SOME, TRY SOME, TAKE 'EM HOME AND FRY SOME.

“That was my first original fish song. I put words from this into some of the others. This was the first fish song in my own tune. So after the people begin to get too familiar with the tune then I grasped the idea of changing my tune to git the tune of the most popular song hit of that time.” FISH CRY YO, HO HO, FISH MAN! BRING DOWN YOUR DISHPAN! FISH AIN'T BUT FIVE CENT A POUND. SO COME ON DOWN, AND GATHER AROUND, I GOT THE BEST FISH THAT'S IN THIS TOWN. I GOT PORGIES, CROCKERS TOO. I AIN'T GOT BUT A FEW, SO YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO. COME ON DOWN, AND GATHER ROUND, CAUSE MY FISH AIN'T BUT FIVE CENT A POUND. I'VE GOT 'EM LARGE AND I'VE GOT 'EM SMALL; I GOT EM LONG AND I GOT 'EM TALL; I'VE GOT 'EM FRIED, I GOT 'EM BROILED;

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FISH CRY AND I CAN'T GO HOME 'TILL I SELL 'EM ALL! SO YO, HO, HO, FISH MAN! BRING DOWN YOUR DISHPAN! CAUSE FISH AIN'T BUT FIVE CENT A POUND!

CRAB SONG I'VE GOT CRABS. THEY BITE AND NAB. I GOT CRABS, THAT PUNCH AND JAB. I GOT CRABS, THAT SING LIKE CAB. SO BE LIKE MY COUSIN, AND BUY A COUPLE OF DOZEN, OF MY CRABS TODAY. BUY 'EM BY THE DOZEN. I'LL PUT 'EM IN A SACK, HURRY UP AND GET 'EM CAUSE I AIN'T COMING BACK. COME ON

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FOLKS I GOT CRABS TODAY. BETTER GET SOME, BEFORE I GO AWAY. CAUSE ALL MY CRABS ARE NICE AND LIVE, YOU CAN TAKE MY WORD THAT THAT'S NO JIVE.

("Jive in Harlem, another way, means, 'you're kidding me'. I was making that up as I was going along there. My crab song ends away up there".)

SONG TO KID THE ICE MAN SAY, ICE MAN, I WANT SOME ICE TODAY, SO HURRY UP AND BRING IT, BEFORE I GO AWAY, BRING FIFTY POUND, AND HURRY RIGHT DOWN, CAUSE YOU GOT THE BEST ICE IN THIS TOWN. YOU CAN CHOP IT UP AND MAKE IT SMALL, BETTER BRING IT QUICK OR NOT AT ALL. I WANT TO PUT IT ON MY FISH BECAUSE IT'S NICE AND HOT, (the weather) AND I BETTER DO SOMETHING BEFORE THEY ROT.

ONCE UPON A TIME ONCE UPON A TIME I FELL IN LOVE, WITH AN ANGEL FROM UP ABOVE. YES, I FELL IN LOVE, WITH A HEAVENLY DOVE, ONCE UPON A TIME.

"With fish anything goes but with this I want to be working a little careful. That's why I only have one verse on it so far."

SONG ABOUT THE RECORDING NOW I SING ALL THESE SONGS, FOR MR. HALPERT AND HATCH. I BIN SINGIN' AN HOUR, I GUESS I'VE SANG A BATCH. THEY SEEM QUITE APPRECIATIVE AND I ENJOYED IT, TOO. IF NOBODY ELSE DON'T LIKE 'EM THEY KNOW WHAT THEY CAN DO. MR. HATCH ASKED ME TO SING 'EM, FOR THE W P A. SO WHEN YOU HEAR THEM JUST SWING AND SWAY. DON'T FUSS, AND DON'T FIGHT, CAUSE THE JIVE IS RIGHT (feeling good) AND IF YOU WANNA, YOU CAN JUMP ALL NIGHT.

("Jive is just a fast word that they use, common jitterbug slang. It means several different things. It usually means, 'something'. It's a sort of neutral word".)

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LET'S GO FISHING LET'S GO FISHING, DOWN BY THE HOLE. YOU GET THE BAIT
I GET THE POLE. LET'S GO FOR A RIDE, LET'S DON'T GO FAR. I'LL FURNISH THE
GAS, YOU FURNISH THE CAR. LET'S HAVE A FISH FRY, LET'S BEGIN. I GOT THE
FISH, YOU GET THE GIN. ZA AU, WHOO, ZA ZU, ZEE. ZAZU, ZAZU, ZAZU, ZOO.

“The zazu part came out of a song but the rest of the tune I made up myself.”

FISH CRY IN SPANISH FESCO FRESCO SENQUO [CONTIVO] LIBERA! FISH, FRESH,
FIVE, CENT A POUND!

(Phonetic approximation) COAL CRY I GOT COAL, SO GET YOUR GOLD! I GOT COAL,
AND I'M GETTIN OLD SO GET YOUR GOLD, AND BUY MY COAL. BETTER BUY MY
COAL DOGGONE YOUR COAL. I GOT COAL.

HI DE HO FISH SONG

(Tune of Minnie the Moocher) I'M THE HI DE HI DE HO FISH MAN; AND I CAN REALLY
SELL FISH, I CAN; SOME TIME I SELL 'EM HIGH, HI DE HI DE HI DE HI. SOME TIME I
SELL 'EM MIGHTY LOW. LO, HO, HO, HO, HO, HO. I SELL 'EM UP, I SELL 'EM DOWN,
I SELL 'EM ALL AROUND THIS TOWN. SO HI, DE, HI, DE, HI. AND HI DE HO DE HO,
HI DE HI DE HI. HI DE HO, HO, HO, HO.